

..THE..

CHURCH OF ENGLAND

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A SKETCH OF

-:-HER ORIGIN AND HISTORY.-:-

A SERMON

Preached in St. George's Church, Ottawa,
on Sunday, January 15th, 1899.

...BY...

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NO claim to originality is put forth for this address. It is only published at the request of members of the congregation, who were kind enough to think that the brief compilation of historic facts might be of some use in setting forth the true position and claims of our Church. Those who may wish to go more fully into this subject are recommended to read "The Anglican Reformation," by the Rev. Professor Clark which is to be had at Messrs. Hope & Sons.

J. M. S.



THE
Church of England and Her Origin.

BY

J. M. SNOWDON.

Matt. xvi. 18. *"Upon this rock I will build My Church."*

Acts ii. 24. *"The Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved."*

The expression "The Kingdom of God," or "the Kingdom of Heaven," as used in the Holy Scriptures, is one which has three distinct meanings. It may mean the outward visible organization which Christ instituted for the evangelization of the world, to whom He gave the commission : "Go ye and teach all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." Or secondly, it may refer to Christ's Kingship in the hearts of individual men. Thus we read, "The Kingdom of God is within you," and again, "The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." Or again, it may refer to that Kingdom which is yet to come, up to which both of these previous kingdoms are to lead, and in which they will find their completion. It is the kingdom, in this final sense that is referred to by Our Lord when he says : "Verily I say unto you I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God."

It is of the Kingdom of God in its outward and visible aspect that I wish to speak this morning. "The need for such an organization arose directly out of the acknowledged purpose of

Jesus Christ, viz. : to establish a society destined to be the light of the world and to issue in a perfected Kingdom of Glory. In seeking to understand our position we do well not to forget that Christians, though spiritual, are still human ; Our Lord acted on this principle, and it is one secret of the success of His Gospel. It recognizes things as they are, and that a spiritual kingdom can best advance among men by means of a definitely ordered society, through which instruction can be given, public worship reverently offered, and order preserved.

The fact that Christ did found such an ordered society is evident, both from His ordaining two sacraments, with outward and visible signs and also from His giving to the Twelve, perhaps also to the Seventy, special commissions, which were not given to all Christians alike. We judge also from the actions of the Apostles in appointing Ministers to assist in and carry on their work that this "order" was intended by the head of the Church to be continued. In fact both the need of such a federated society and its actual existence in Apostolic times are beyond dispute.

Our Lord had a great purpose to fulfil--the "edifying (i.e. building up) of His Mystical Body"—For that purpose He wisely founded a visible Church, to be, as it were, the scaffolding by means of which the Spiritual building could best advance, necessary for a time, but afterwards to pass away when "that which is perfect should come." As long as we are in these bodies of our humiliation "so long will the duly ordered visible Church remain, necessary for its own sake, necessary because the Lord Himself we believe would have it so."

The first Christian Church may be said to have consisted of the little company alluded to in St. John i, 35-41. During the three years of our Lord's earthly Ministry, others were called. After His ascension, when St. Peter stood up to address the dis-

ciples, we read that "the number of names together were about one hundred and twenty." After the descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, we are told that "there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers,——and the Lord added (through the apostles) to the Church daily such as were being saved." Then came days of persecution, when Saul made havoc of the Church and they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. From this point onward the allusions to the Church, both in the Acts and in the Epistles are of frequent occurrence, and we can readily trace in these allusions the way in which our Lord's purpose of founding a Church was gradually carried out. We have first of all, the Christian body in some particular place spoken of as a Church. Thus we read of the apostles returning to Lystra and Iconium and Antioch, and ordaining elders in every Church, the allusion clearly being to the Christian Congregations in each several place. At Antioch, "when they were come they gathered the Church together," the writer clearly meaning the Christians at that place. "Being brought on their way by the Church," here again the Christians at Antioch are referred to. After the Council at Jerusalem we read "thus it pleased the apostles and elders with the whole church to send chosen men." Here again by "the Church" is meant only the community of Christians dwelling in Jerusalem. Again in such a passage as "He that prophesieth edifieth the Church" the reference is quite obviously to the local body gathered together for public worship. In the salutation of some of the Epistles we find the term used in a similar sense. Thus St. Paul speaks of "The Church of God which is at Corinth," and "the Church of the Thessalonians." As time went on and the members of these local Churches increased, we find them grouped together as belonging to one great province,

when they are always spoken of as "the Churches." And so we find reference to the Churches of Galatia, the Churches of Judæa, the Churches of Asia, the Churches of Macedonia and "the Churches of the Gentiles." At the outset, supervision over these local Churches was exercised by the apostles themselves. But as time went on and the number of these Churches increased, this became impossible. Whereupon, they appointed to represent them, presiding elders or Bishops, committing to them powers of rule and ordination. Such were James at Jerusalem, Timothy at Ephesus, and Titus in Crete, and thus there gradually grew up an outward and visible body connected together by the authority of the apostles and their immediate successors in office. It is the Church in this wider aspect that is referred to in such passages as these "Give none offence neither to the Jews nor to the Gentiles nor to the Church of God." And again "unto Him be Glory in the Church by Christ Jesus."

Such then was the manner in which was carried out our Lord's purpose of founding a visible society for the extension of His kingdom among men. And "this Society founded more than eighteen hundred years ago notwithstanding repeated assaults by the powers of evil still exists and shall continue a *visible* Church, until her work is done, until "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign for ever and ever." Then the earthly aspect of the Church shall have an end—the scaffolding of the Temple, around which so much fierce controversy has raged shall be removed. All that offends shall be cast out and Christ's Holy Catholic Church shall be fully manifest, "a great multitude which no man can number of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues" shall be presented to God as the outcome of the Saviour's redeeming love, a glorious church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing."

Then "the great Church victorious
Shall be the Church at rest."

We have then undoubted scriptural authority for the statement in our Creeds that we believe in "One Catholic and Apostolic Church". Let us now go on to consider what is the relationship between the Church of England to which we belong and that Primitive Apostolic Church in which we declare our reverent belief, and which is so often mentioned in the writings of the New Testament? In other words is the Church of England a modern man made society or is it a Church of Apostolic origin, just as were the Churches of Galatia, Macedonia and Judæa, to which allusion has already been made?

On this subject it would seem that there exist in the popular mind some ideas which are entirely erroneous. The Honourable Minister of Education lecturing recently in the City of Toronto on "Canadian History," in illustration of the truism that great events sometimes resulted from causes which at the time seemed insignificant and common place, made the statement that "Henry VIII quarrelled with his first wife and out of that quarrel eventually sprung the Church of England." It does not surprise us to have this view put forward by Roman Catholic Controversialists. They have a purpose to serve by doing so, and when facts have failed them, they have not hesitated to have recourse to "fables." But we should have expected a more accurate acquaintance with the acknowledged facts of history from a gentleman occupying the position of head of the teaching profession in the Province of Ontario.

Equally erroneous is the idea that England owes her Christianity to the mission sent from Rome in 596 under St. Augustine.

When, or by whom, Christianity was first preached in England is uncertain, but the facts of history conclusively prove that the Church was planted there most probably in the second century, most certainly, not later than the early part of the fourth century, and that she has had a continuous existence there, from that date to the present time. So early as the fourth century the British Church furnished martyrs in the terrible persecution under Diocletian ; and to one of them who refused to sacrifice to the gods, the familiar name of the Church, Town and Diocese of St. Albans is due. The very fact that persecution extended to Britain, is proof of something like a regularly established Church, worthy of being put down by violent means.

Earlier still, in the decree convening the Council of Nicea A. D. 325, special mention is made of the Church of Britain. This would have been impossible if the British Church had not been in close communion and fellowship with the other Apostolic Churches of Christendom. Earlier still, three British Bishops whose names have come down to us, were present at a Council at Arles, to consider the question of the Donatist schism in Africa, A. D. 314. Earlier still Tertullian, a Roman writer, dating from 201, says :—"Regions of the Britons, inaccessible to the Romans, have assuredly been subdued to Christ." Origen, writing in the year 239, tells us that Britain had but one religion in his day, and that the religion of Christ. These facts are sufficient to prove the existence of a flourishing church in England *three hundred years before the arrival of St. Augustine* and his band of missionaries in 596.

When Augustine came to England he found no less than seven British Bishops and one Archbishop. He worked with much zeal, and at the outset with considerable success, in the kingdom of Kent, but eventually his mission was comparatively a failure.

At that time the British Church had its own Liturgy and sturdily resisted Augustine's demands as to the proper time of observing Easter, as to the mode of baptism, and as to the tonsure. Its clergy, moreover, *refused to be subject to the Pope*. In this connection it has been well observed, "The resistance of the British Church to the demands of Augustine is the first of a long series of protests on the part of Christians in Britain against Papal supremacy, so that when the church of this country (England) is said to be "Protestant" we ought not to understand that it has objected to Papal influence over it from the times of the Tudor Kings only, but that it never willingly allowed to the Bishops of Rome any legal jurisdiction over churchmen in this realm."

This opposition on the part of the British Church to the encroachments of the Roman Mission continued until the close of the seventh century, when under the guidance of Archbishop Theodore the separate organizations were merged into one, and were henceforth known as the Church of England. It is impossible, in the time at my disposal, to give even an outline of the history of the Church during the centuries preceding the Reformation. During these years undoubtedly the authority of Rome did become supreme over the Church of England; yet we must remember that she remained England's Church still, while from time to time both Church and State vigorously protested against the Roman encroachments. "It was that Church of England which, in the year 790, rejected the veneration and service of images, though commanded by the Pope, which a few years later prohibited the English Bishops going to Rome for the pall. It was to bring that English Church into subjection that the Pope sanctioned and blessed the marauding expedition of William the Conqueror. It was that English Church which the Pope, in the year

1114, complained of as treating him with scant reverence, and for presuming to act independently of him. It was that English Church concerning which the Magna Charta enacts in its first clause that "the Church of England shall be free and retain all her laws and ancient liberties intact." It was that Church of England which, in 1307, forced the passing of the statute of provisors prohibiting taxes and appointments, and the statute of præmunire in 1335, which altogether prohibited appeals to Rome, and which concurred in the action of Parliament in 1399, which repudiated the right of the Chief Pontiff or anyone else to interfere with the affairs of the Kingdom."

It was this old Catholic Church of England which had its beginning long before the days of Augustine, which when the opportunity offered through the quarrel of Henry VIII. with the Pope, rose up in its might and flung off the accretions of ages, and reformed herself upon the model of Holy Scripture and the primitive Catholic Church. The emancipation of the Church was brought about not by King Henry VIII.—he remained a Romanist all his life—not by the state, but by the *action of the Church itself* asserting her own independence in the most orderly and effective way, in her regular convocations and by the voice of her own bishops.

Freeman, the historian says, "It is certain that no English ruler, no English Parliament thought of setting up a new Church, but simply of reforming the existing English Church." And again, "the facts of history compel us to assume the absolute identity of the Church of England after the Reformation with the Church of England before the Reformation."

The very word Re-formation points to something which had an existence at the time when it was reformed. It is impossible

to reform a thing which is non-existent. If the Church of England is now a reformed Church, then it must have existed prior to the Reformation, otherwise, there could have been nothing to reform. The vicious man who becomes an honest citizen is reformed, but he has not lost his identity. So it was with the Church before and after the Reformation. The errors of the Church were not the Church herself. In quitting them she did not quit herself, any more than a man changes his face when he washes it, or loses his identity when he recovers from a disease. The English Church after the Reformation, was quite as much the English Church as Naaman was Naaman after he had washed away his leprosy in the River Jordan. Briefly stated then, the facts are these: How Christianity was introduced into England is uncertain. We have positive evidence of the existence there of a duly organized Church four hundred years before a Roman Missionary set foot upon the island. During the years succeeding the Italian Mission, the Roman Church succeeded in gaining supremacy over the British Church, forced her to acknowledge the authority of the Pope, and introduced those doctrines and ceremonial usages peculiar to the Church of Rome. At the Reformation the British Church successfully reasserted her independence, rejected the Pope's supremacy and returned once more to the primitive simplicity which characterized her in the days before Rome had asserted influence over her.

Brethren, I am quite well aware that in certain quarters there exists in our day a tendency to over emphasize the Primitive and Apostolic character of our Church, to so magnify the Church, as to obscure the glory of the Church's Divine Head, danger of forgetting that a splendid past is only good to contemplate, when it incites us to renewed efforts to make a splendid present. But this is poor justification for

anyone going to the opposite extreme. and forgetful of the Apostolic character of the Church and our Lord's prayer for its unity, assuming that every one who can surround himself with a few followers has a right to start a church for himself. "Mark them," says the Apostle, "which cause divisions, and avoid them," advice which is just as good and just as much needed in our day as when the letter was written to the Christians living at Rome.

Brethren, let us ever stand fast in our loyal attachment to the old Church of England. Let us act up to her teaching in the spirit as well as in the letter. We do not want importations whether from Rome or Geneva. Let us be English Churchmen, and not mere apers of any foreign or strange communion. Let us be loyal to our Church, and especially let us cultivate a spirit of charity towards all men. The followers of Christ should be slow to turn their weapons one upon another when there is still so much to be done. The Assyrian is at the gate. Let not Ephraim envy Judah nor Judah vex Ephraim.

Let me conclude with this prayer of one of England's Archbishops: "Oh Gracious Father, we humbly beseech Thee to bless Thy Holy Catholic Church and fill it with all truth and peace. Where it is corrupt, purge it; where it is in error, direct it; where it is superstitious, rectify it; where it is right, strengthen and confirm it; where it is in want, furnish it; where it is divided and rent asunder make up the breaches of it, O Thou Holy One of Israel. Amen."

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